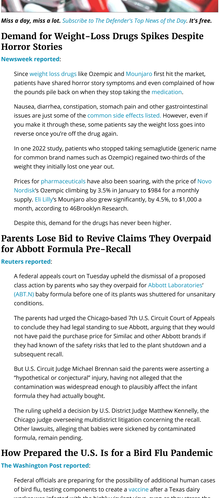
04/03/24 | BIG PHARMA

Demand for Weight-Loss Drugs Spikes Despite Horror Stories + More

The Defender's Big Pharma Watch delivers the latest headlines related to pharmaceutical companies and their products, including vaccines, drugs, and medical devices and treatments. The views expressed in the below excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender. Our goal is to provide readers with breaking news that affects human health and the environment.

By **The Defender Staff**



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Demand for Weight-Loss Drugs Spikes Despite Horror Stories

Newsweek reported:

Since weight loss drugs like Ozempic and Mounjaro first hit the market, patients have shared horror story symptoms and even complained of how the pounds pile back on when they stop taking the medication.

Nausea, diarrhea, constipation, stomach pain and other gastrointestinal issues are just some of the common side effects listed. However, once you make it through these, some patients say the weight loss goes into reverse once you're off the drug again.

In one 2022 study, patients who stopped taking semaglutide (generic name for common brand names such as Ozempic) regained two-thirds of the weight they initially lost one year out.

Prices for pharmaceuticals have also been soaring, with the price of Novo Nordisk's Ozempic climbing by 3.5% in January to $984 for a monthly supply. Eli Lilly's Mounjaro also grew significantly, by 4.5%, to $1,000 a month, according to 46Brooklyn Research.

Despite this, demand for the drugs has never been higher.

Parents Lose Bid to Revive Claims They Overpaid for Abbott Formula Pre-Recall

Reuters reported:

A federal appeals court on Tuesday upheld the dismissal of a proposed class action by parents who say they overpaid for Abbott Laboratories' (ABT.N) baby formula before one of its plants was shuttered for unsanitary conditions.

The parents had urged the Chicago-based 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to conclude they had legal standing to sue Abbott, arguing that they would not have paid the purchase price for Similac and other Abbott brands if they had known of the safety risks that led to the plant shutdown and a subsequent recall.

But U.S. Circuit Judge Michael Brennan said the parents were asserting a "hypothetical or conjectural" injury, having not alleged that the contamination was widespread enough to plausibly affect the infant formula they had actually bought.

The ruling upheld a decision by U.S. District Judge Matthew Kennelly, the Chicago judge overseeing multidistrict litigation concerning the recall. Other lawsuits, alleging that babies were sickened by contaminated formula, remain pending.

How Prepared the U.S. Is for a Bird Flu Pandemic

The Washington Post reported:

Federal officials are preparing for the possibility of additional human cases of bird flu, testing components to create a vaccine after a Texas dairy worker was infected with the highly virulent virus, even as they stress the United States remains far from needing to activate a full-blown emergency response.

Two candidate vaccine viruses — essentially the building blocks manufacturers use to produce a vaccine — appear well matched to protect against the H5N1 strain circulating among dairy cattle and birds, according to federal health officials.

It'd probably be weeks to months before those shots could first be made available if needed, according to a Health and Human Services official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe an ongoing investigation.

Docs Don't Want to Treat 'Them'

Politico reported:

Turns out that lifting restrictions on doctors prescribing buprenorphine, a controlled drug used to treat opioid use disorder, is only the first step to expanding access to addiction treatment.

A 2022 law removed a requirement that practitioners undergo special training to prescribe the drug. But the measure hasn't been the game-changer lawmakers and federal agencies had hoped it would be, according to Thomas Prevoznik, deputy assistant administrator for the Drug Enforcement Administration.

"The biggest thing I heard and continue to hear from prescribers and pharmacists ... is they continue to call those who suffer from opioid use disorder 'them,' like they don't want 'them,' they don't want to treat 'them' in their practice," Prevoznik said.

That attitude was an eye-opener for the DEA, he said, noting that people with opioid use disorder are "our family members, our neighbors, our friends. ... They're dying. This has to become part of mainstream healthcare," he said.

More Americans Forgoing ADHD Meds as Shortages Drag On

Axios reported:

Shortages of commonly prescribed drugs for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have stretched on for nearly 18 months, with no clear end in sight for many Americans who've found it difficult if not impossible to get the treatments.

Why it matters: As demand for stimulants like Adderall and Vyvanse soared, the fill rate for such prescriptions has dropped more than 10% in two years, according to a new analysis from health analytics firm Truveta.

The big picture: ADHD drugs are among a high number of generic medicine shortages in recent years which cancer drugs, asthma medication, hormones and children's Tylenol.

Among the problems in many cases is a broken market for older, cheaper drugs that defies an easy fix.

AbbVie Makes a Case for 'Big Bets' in New Campaign Highlighting Its Scientific Work

Fierce Pharma reported:

AbbVie likes big bets, and it cannot lie. In its latest corporate marketing campaign, the Big Pharma is pulling back the curtain to show off the work that goes into its drug development. The campaign, dubbed "The Case for Big Bets," is designed to give a behind-the-scenes look into AbbVie's research and development efforts.

It'll include a range of stories featuring the drugmaker's R&D leaders and organized around three main concepts: AbbVie's "ultimate focus" on developing cures, its use of advanced technologies to spur scientific breakthroughs and its goal of significantly accelerating the drug development timeline.

The stories that make up the campaign will be shared both on AbbVie's website and on its social media feeds.

The tone of AbbVie's latest corporate campaign, with its focus on touting the company's R&D work, echoes those of other branding efforts recently launched by several of its fellow Big Pharmas. Earlier this year, Pfizer's entry in the Super Bowl ad canon was titled "Here's to Science" and showcased its role in decades' worth of scientific breakthroughs, while Eli Lilly kicked off the year with a new TV spot in which it sees, "We will never stop trying to get better, because when medicine gets better, all of us can get better."

There Are New Flu Vaccines on Offer in Australia in 2024. Here's What to Know About Them

The Guardian reported:

It's difficult to predict the intensity of the flu season at this point in the year, but we can sometimes get clues from the northern hemisphere. There, the season started earlier than usual for the third year running (peaking in early January rather than late February or March), with a similar number of reported cases and hospitalizations to the previous year.

Influenza vaccines are recommended annually, but there are now an increasing number of different vaccine types. Here's what to know about this year's shots, available from this month.

All current influenza vaccines in Australia contain four different strains (known as quadrivalent vaccines). One of the strains appeared to disappear during the COVID pandemic, and the WHO has recently recommended dropping this strain from the vaccine. It's expected trivalent (three-strain) vaccines will become available in the near future.

There are eight brands of flu vaccines available in Australia in 2024. These include egg-based vaccines (Vaxigrip Tetra, Fluarix Tetra, Afluria Quad, FluQuadri and Influvac Tetra), cell-based vaccines (Flucelvax Quad), adjuvanted vaccines (Fluad Quad) and high-dose vaccines (Fluzone High-Dose Quad).

A Dementia-Focused VC Digs Past Amyloid for New Kinds of Brain Drugs

BioPharma Dive reported:

Not long ago, neuroscience was a disparaging field in drug development, with pharmaceutical giants like Pfizer, Amgen and others retreating from the field. Now, with clinical and regulatory advances in Alzheimer's disease, ALS and depression, the brain is once again a place investors are staking a claim.

While big pharma stepped back, venture capitalists have been working behind the scenes to bring new ideas forward. For the Dementia Discovery Fund, which has committed almost $500 million to brain drug developers, that has meant focusing on science outside the mainstream.

"DDF was created to invest in new companies with a diversified pipeline of dementia therapeutics," said Jonathan Behr, U.S. partner at Dementia Discovery Fund, or DDF, which is operated by SV Health Investors. "The conceit was that the large pharmaceutical companies were focusing a lot of their resources on the same mechanisms like anti-amyloid antibodies and over-investing in a really narrow set of drugs."

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